

In the Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A method for merging a plurality of virtual connections to form a merged virtual connection, comprising:

buffering data of each of the plurality of virtual connections into a corresponding one of a plurality of buffers, wherein each of the plurality of virtual connections is identified by an identifier, wherein each of the plurality of virtual connections is included in a class of a plurality of classes;

queuing an identity of a virtual connection in a queue when data that constitute a complete packet are buffered in a corresponding buffer, wherein the queue includes a plurality of queues, wherein each of the plurality of queues corresponds to a class of the plurality of classes, wherein queuing the identity of a virtual connection further comprises queuing the identity of the virtual connection into a corresponding one of the plurality of queues based on class of the virtual connection;

obtaining prioritization information for the merged virtual connection, wherein the prioritization information includes class prioritization information; and

generating a data stream for the merged virtual connection based on the prioritization information and virtual connection identities stored in the queue, wherein the merged virtual connection is identified by a merged identifier, wherein each unit of data in the data stream includes the merged identifier.

2. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein generating the data stream for the merged virtual connection further comprises dequeuing data from the plurality of buffers to produce the data stream, wherein dequeuing of the data is based on the prioritization information.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~3~~ 1, wherein each of the plurality of queues is a linked list, wherein queuing the identity of a virtual connection further comprises appending the identity of the virtual connection to a tail of a corresponding one of the linked lists based on class of the virtual connection.

5. (Currently amended) The method of claim 3 1, wherein the prioritization information allocates available bandwidth on the merged virtual connection based on class.

6. (Currently amended) The method of claim 3 1, wherein obtaining prioritization information further comprises referencing a prioritization table that stores an accessing sequence for the plurality of queues.

7. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein generating the data stream further comprises generating the data stream such that data corresponding to different packets that are combined to produce the merged virtual connection are not intermingled.

8. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein determining that data that constitute a complete packet are buffered further comprises detecting an end of message indication that indicates a final unit of data for the complete packet.

9. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 further comprises generating a data stream for a port by combining the data stream for the merged virtual connection with a data stream corresponding to an additional virtual connection, wherein the identifier corresponding to the additional virtual connection is different than the merged identifier.

10. (Currently amended) A virtual connection merging system, comprising:

a plurality of buffers, wherein each buffer of the plurality of buffers corresponds to a virtual connection of a plurality of virtual connections, wherein each of the plurality of virtual connections has a unique identifier, wherein data received for each of the plurality of virtual connections are buffered in corresponding buffers of the plurality of buffers;

a queuing block that stores identities of virtual connections that have complete packets buffered in the plurality of buffers, wherein a complete packet includes a plurality of units of data, wherein the queuing block comprises a plurality of queues corresponding to a plurality of classes, wherein each of the virtual connections corresponds to one of the plurality of classes, wherein the identities of the virtual connections for which complete packets are buffered are stored in corresponding queues of the plurality of queues based on class;

a prioritization block that stores prioritization information; and

a merging system controller operably coupled to the plurality of buffers, the queuing block, and the prioritization block, wherein the merging system controller dequeues data from the plurality of buffers based on the prioritization information and the identities stored in the queuing block to produce a data stream corresponding to a merged virtual connection, wherein data are dequeued from the plurality of buffers by the merging system controller such that data from a packet are included in a continuous portion of the data stream for the merged virtual connection, wherein data included in the data stream for the merged virtual connection include an identifier corresponding to the merged virtual connection.

11. (Canceled)

12. (Currently amended) The virtual connection merging system of claim ~~11~~ 10, wherein the plurality of queues further comprises a plurality of linked lists, wherein when data that constitute a complete packet are buffered in one of the plurality of buffers, identity of a particular virtual connection to which the complete packet corresponds is added to a tail of the linked list for a class to which the particular virtual connection corresponds.

13. (Currently amended) The virtual connection merging system of claim ~~44~~ 10, wherein the prioritization information stored in the prioritization block prioritizes inclusion of packets in the data stream for the merged virtual connection based on class.

14. (Previously presented) The virtual connection merging system of claim 13, wherein the prioritization information causes transitions between classes for dequeuing based on at least one of: a number of packets for a particular class included in the data stream for the merged virtual connection and a number of units of data for a particular class included in the data stream for the merged virtual connection.

15. (Original) The virtual connection merging system of claim 10, wherein the virtual connection merging system is included in the ingress portion of a communication switch.

16. (Original) The virtual connection merging system of claim 10, wherein the virtual connection merging system is included in the egress portion of a communication switch.

17. (Currently amended) A virtual connection merging processor, comprising:

a processing module; and

memory operably coupled to the processing module, wherein the memory stores operating instructions that, when executed by the processing module, cause the processing module to perform the functions of:

buffering data of each of a plurality of virtual connections into a corresponding one of a plurality of buffers, wherein each of the plurality of virtual connections is identified by a identifier, wherein each of the plurality of virtual connections is included in a class of a plurality of classes;

queuing an identity of a virtual connection in a queue when data that constitute a complete packet are buffered in a corresponding buffer, wherein the queue includes a plurality of queues, wherein each of the plurality of queues corresponds to a class of the plurality of classes, wherein the processing module queues the identity of a virtual connection by queuing the identity of the virtual connection into a corresponding one of the plurality of queues based on class of the virtual connection;

obtaining prioritization information for the merged virtual connection, wherein the prioritization information includes class prioritization information; and

generating a data stream for a merged virtual connection based on the prioritization information and virtual connection identities stored in the queue, wherein the merged virtual connection is identified by a merged identifier, wherein each unit of data in the data stream includes the merged identifier.

18. (Previously presented) The virtual connection merging processor of claim 17, wherein the memory further comprises operating instructions that, when executed by the processing module, cause the processing module to generate the data stream for the merged virtual connection by dequeuing data from the plurality of buffers to produce the data stream, wherein dequeuing of the data is based on the prioritization information.

19. (Canceled)

20. (Currently amended) The virtual connection processor of claim ~~49~~ 17, wherein each of the plurality of queues is a linked list, wherein the processing module queues the identity of a virtual connection by appending the identity of the virtual connection to a tail of a corresponding one of the linked lists based on class of the virtual connection.

21. (Currently amended) The virtual connection processor of claim ~~49~~ 17, wherein the prioritization information allocates available bandwidth on the merged virtual connection based on class.

22. (Currently amended) The virtual connection processor of claim ~~49~~ 17, wherein the processing module obtains prioritization information by referencing a prioritization table that stores an accessing sequence for the plurality of queues.

23. (Previously presented) The virtual connection processing module of claim 17, wherein the memory further comprises operating instructions such that the processing module performs the function of generating the data stream such that data corresponding to different packets that are combined to produce the merged virtual connection are not intermingled.

24. (Previously presented) The virtual connection processing module of claim 17, wherein the memory further comprises operating instructions such that the processing module determines that data that constitute a complete packet are buffered by detecting an end of message indication that indicates a final data element for the complete packet.

25. (Currently amended) A method for merging a plurality of virtual connections to form a merged virtual connection, comprising:

buffering data of each of the plurality of virtual connections into a corresponding one of a plurality of buffers, wherein each of the plurality of virtual connections is identified by a identifier, wherein each of the plurality of virtual connections is included in a class of a plurality of classes;

queuing an identity of a virtual connection in a queue when data that constitute a complete packet are buffered in a corresponding buffer, wherein the queue includes a plurality of queues, wherein each of the plurality of queues corresponds to a class of the plurality of classes, wherein queuing the identity of a virtual connection further comprises queuing the identity of the virtual connection into a corresponding one of the plurality of queues based on class of the virtual connection;

obtaining prioritization information for the merged virtual connection, wherein the prioritization information includes class prioritization information; and

generating a data stream for the merged virtual connection based on the prioritization information and virtual connection identities stored in the queue, wherein the merged virtual connection is identified by a merged identifier, wherein each unit of data in the data stream includes the merged identifier, wherein dequeuing of data is performed in intervals, where different classes receive priority for different ones of the intervals.

26. (Previously presented) The method of claim 25, wherein generating the data stream for the merged virtual connection further comprises dequeuing data from the plurality of buffers to produce the data stream, wherein dequeuing of the data is based on the prioritization information.

27. (Canceled)

28. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~27~~ 25, wherein each of the plurality of queues is a linked list, wherein queuing the identity of a virtual connection further comprises appending the identity of the virtual connection to a tail of a corresponding one of the linked lists based on class of the virtual connection.

29. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~27~~ 25, wherein the prioritization information allocates available bandwidth on the merged virtual connection based on class.

30. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~27~~ 25, wherein obtaining prioritization information further comprises referencing a prioritization table that stores an accessing sequence for the plurality of queues.

31. (Previously presented) The method of claim 25, wherein generating the data stream further comprises generating the data stream such that data corresponding to different packets that are combined to produce the merged virtual connection are not intermingled.

32. (Previously presented) The method of claim 25, wherein determining that data that constitute a complete packet are buffered further comprises detecting an end of message indication that indicates a final unit of data for the complete packet.

33. (Previously presented) The method of claim 25 further comprises generating a stream for a port by combining the data stream for the merged virtual connection with a data stream corresponding to an additional virtual connection, wherein the identifier corresponding to the additional virtual connection is different than the merged identifier.

34. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the queuing the identity of the virtual connection in the queue when data that constitute the complete packet are buffered in the corresponding buffer further comprises:

limiting a number of times the identity of the virtual connection may be queued in the queue.

35. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~3~~ 1 wherein the generating the data stream for the merged virtual connection further comprises:

when a first class of the plurality of classes does not have data to transmit during a particular interval for which it has priority, reverting the priority for the particular interval to a highest priority class.

36. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~3~~ 1 wherein the generating the data stream for the merged virtual connection further comprises:

when a first class of the plurality of classes does not have data to transmit during a particular interval for which it has priority, incrementing a pointer within a prioritization information table.

37. (Previously presented) The method of claim 25 wherein generating the data stream for the merged virtual connection based on the prioritization information and the virtual connection identities stored in the queue further comprises:

transmitting a number of packets during each interval of the intervals, wherein when a particular class has priority, including a predetermined number of packets corresponding to that class in the data stream.